



King County

Restore Non-Medicaid Funding for Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Updated October 20, 2014

Request

Restore to fiscal year 2014 levels the major cuts to state flexible non-Medicaid funding for mental health (\$20.4 million statewide) and state non-Medicaid substance abuse funds (\$10.8 million statewide), to avoid further degradation of the behavioral health system of care.

Continuing Cuts Would Leave Many Untreated

Impacts to the County from the continuation of recent cuts will reduce the amount of service available to King County, leaving many individuals untreated. This likely will increase interaction with law enforcement and the burden on the criminal justice system and become a public safety concern.

Painful Cuts to State Funding in Recent Years, With Reductions Most Acute This Year

Cuts to state funding for behavioral health have been very deep in recent years. Statewide, flexible non-Medicaid mental health funding from the state general fund has been reduced by \$33.2 million (27%) since 2009, and has been exacerbated by concurrent elimination of state hospital beds.

In addition, state non-Medicaid substance abuse funding has similarly been reduced by over \$20.2 million (25%) statewide since 2010 – in addition to cuts to the criminal justice treatment account and total elimination of the community mobilization program.

\$31.2 million of the cuts to core state non-Medicaid appropriations for mental health and substance abuse occurred in fiscal year 2015 alone – of which \$7.4 million were absorbed by King County.

Medicaid Expansion Misconception

During the last two legislative sessions, it became apparent that there was a common misconception that Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) would greatly reduce or eliminate the need for state general funds in the mental health and substance abuse budgets.

However, Medicaid expansion does not address the many essential services that are not Medicaid-reimbursable, or the individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid.

System of Care Depends on State Funds for Medicaid-Ineligible Services and Immigrants

While King County strongly supports the integration of behavioral health with physical health and maximizing the use of Medicaid resources, many critical segments of the service continuum are not reimbursable by Medicaid.

Flexible state non-Medicaid mental health funds are needed for crisis and involuntary commitment (ITA) services, residential treatment, homeless outreach and engagement, and other critical services, none of which are reimbursable by Medicaid.

State substance abuse funds are likewise essential to maintain key Medicaid-ineligible services including sobering, detoxification services at King County's only such facility, outreach to at-risk and vulnerable youth, and involuntary treatment. Also, as expanded outreach efforts resulted in many previously-eligible individuals enrolling in Medicaid, there is now an increased need for state matching funds to meet a growing treatment demand.

State funds are also needed to provide basic services for new or undocumented immigrants who are categorically ineligible for Medicaid.

Consequences of Continuing Recent Cuts

Behavioral health programs and services in King County were minimally disrupted this year due to the use of one-time reserve funds. These dollars are not sustainable, so we are unable to continue to cushion the impact of non-Medicaid cuts on clients in our local community.

Without some relief, we will see reductions in the community-based services and supports that keep people from requiring costly hospitalization, decreases in our ability to respond to crisis needs, and increased criminal justice involvement.

For additional information, please contact:

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